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June 30, 2005

Sony BMG, Mashboxx intune with P2P

By Chris Marlowe

The tortuous relationship between the music industry and peer-to-peer file sharing is entering a potentially rosier phase after Wednesday's announcement that Sony BMG Music Entertainment finalized a licensing deal with Mashboxx.

The deal comes just days after the Supreme Court addressed file-sharing technology and marks the first major recording company to enter into such an agreement.

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"This is a turning point because it shows that the music industry is fully embracing P2P in its purest form," Mashboxx CEO Wayne Rosso said. "The industry deserves a lot of credit for doing so, especially in the wake of a decisive win for Hollywood at the Supreme Court on Monday. I'm a happy guy because last Monday nine old geezers in long black dresses eliminated my competition. God bless them."

Several labels have allowed songs in secured formats to be distributed using P2P, but Rosso takes evident pleasure in describing Mashboxx as "the first -- and only -- desktop file-sharing application in the world authorized by a major content owner."

Mashboxx is in various stages of serious negotiations with all other major labels and a significant number of independents, Rosso said. "I think the rest of the

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industry is on board," he said. "Our doors are open to everybody."

Music from Sony BMG Music Entertainment will be available on Mashboxx at the retail price of 99 cents a track. Unlike most other applications, however, consumers legally can play the entire track a limited number of times before making a purchase decision.

When a consumer searches for a file via P2P, Mashboxx intervenes and delivers the song in its own format. The number of plays is defined by the content owner, but Rosso said he expected most to set a limit of 10 or fewer. Consumers then are invited to purchase the song. If they choose not to, the downloaded file will transform into a typical 30-second preview clip.

Consumers must be connected to the Internet in order to hear the music because the license is checked and verified every time the song is played.

"We're pleased to be working with Wayne and the Mashboxx team as they introduce their new service with the aim of meeting the needs of music fans while at the same time protecting artists and their work," Sony BMG Music Entertainment CEO Andrew Lack said.

"Andy Lack is a terrific guy and a welcome breath of fresh air from the previous administration," Rosso said. "He came in to the job with a fresh set of eyes."

Mashboxx utilizes technology developed by Snocap, described by its chief strategy officer Shawn Fanning as a music registry that serves as a clearinghouse for files that consumers are trading among themselves (HR 6/13). Snocap has deals in place with Vivendi Universal Music, EMI and Warner Music in addition to Sony BMG.

In the future, Rosso intends to meet with movie studios and MPAA president and CEO Dan Glickman in order to offer Mashboxx P2P as a viable and legal method of distribution for their content. "Now that Sony BMG is leading the way for music, I only hope that the film industry follows suit quickly," Rosso said. "I have placed calls to Mr. Glickman but have yet to hear back."

Mashboxx is expected to begin its public stage of testing soon. The company was founded in September 2004 and is based in Virginia Beach, Va., with offices in Madrid, Spain.

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